



COUNCILMEMBER SHERRI S. LIGHTNER

FIRST DISTRICT
CITY OF SAN DIEGO

March 24, 2010

Colonel Frank A. Richie
Commanding Officer
MCAS Miramar
PO Box 452001
San Diego, CA 92145-2001

Dear Colonel Richie,

As you may know, residents of University City were awakened on the night of Thursday, March 18, by the sounds of a Marine Corps F/A-18 making an approach from the west for an emergency landing at MCAS Miramar. Residents have reported observing the jet flying as low as 150 feet above the ground, while emitting a cyclical, surging noise.

University City is a community that is still shaken from the death of four residents in the tragic Marine Corps jet crash on December 8, 2008.

The incident last week raises a number of questions, and I seek your assistance to reassure the University City community that the United States Marines are taking sufficient precaution to protect lives on the ground. In addition, the community needs to know if a new protocol for emergency landings at MCAS Miramar has been established since 2008.

I greatly value the contributions of the military personnel stationed at MCAS Miramar, not only to our country, but to University City. Many service men and women live in University City and are active members of the community. I understand accidents can be unavoidable and unpredictable, but I do believe the community deserves to have its safety concerns acknowledged and allayed.

Flight activity at MCAS Miramar will continue to increase with the impact of the "Grow the Force" Initiative, the recent arrival of the MV-22 Osprey, and the upcoming arrival of the Joint Strike Fighter. I have no doubt that emergency landings will continue to occur at MCAS Miramar, as they do at every airport. The community needs to know if the current protocol for emergency landings truly minimizes the risks on the ground. If not,



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new protocols must be established to provide the community some assurance that their concerns have been acknowledged and every precaution has been taken to minimize risks to the community.

If we can help in any way, please contact me at (619) 236-6611 or sherrilightner@sandiego.gov.

Sincerely,



Sherri S. Lightner
Councilmember, District 1
City of San Diego

cc: Senator Dianne Feinstein
Senator Barbara Boxer
Congressman Brian Bilbray
Congresswoman Susan Davis
C. Laura Thornton, Community Plans & Liaison Officer, MCAS Miramar



UNITED STATES MARINE CORPS
MARINE CORPS AIR STATION MIRAMAR
P.O. BOX 452001
SAN DIEGO, CA 92145-2001

In Reply refer to:

02 APR 2010

Sherri S. Lightner
Councilmember, First District
City of San Diego
202 C Street
San Diego, CA 92101

Dear Councilmember Lightner:

Thank you for your letter of March 24, 2010, expressing the concerns of University City community residents who heard or observed a Navy F/A-18 Hornet land at Marine Corps Air Station (MCAS) Miramar late in the evening of March 18, 2010. I want to assure you and the community that this event was consistent with established protocols, flight procedures and community safety was not placed at risk.

The Navy F/A-18 had been operating from the USS JOHN C. STENNIS off the coast of Southern California on March 18. When the Captain of the STENNIS directed the pilot to land at an airfield ashore, MCAS Miramar was selected as the primary divert airfield because of emerging weather conditions at Naval Air Station North Island. The pilot executed a standard instrument approach to Runway 6 under the control of air traffic controllers using an Airport Surveillance Radar. The aircraft's altitude over the University City Community was never below the prescribed altitudes of the approach. The late hour and meteorological conditions likely account for witness perceptions that the aircraft was louder and lower than normal. The plane was not experiencing any mechanical malfunction.

The Marine Corps remains committed to safety and the concerns of all the surrounding communities. I look forward to speaking to the University City Planning Group on April 18, 2010.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "F. A. Richie", is positioned above the typed name.

F. A. RICHIE
Colonel, U.S. Marine Corps
Commanding Officer



UNITED STATES MARINE CORPS
MARINE CORPS AIR STATION MIRAMAR
P.O. BOX 452001
SAN DIEGO, CA 92145-2001

11000
CO
12 Apr 10

Sherri S. Lightner
Councilmember, First District
City of San Diego
202 C Street
San Diego, CA 92101

Dear Councilmember Lightner:

Your Chief of Staff, Jesse Mays, forwarded to my staff your follow-up questions regarding the F/A-18 landing at Marine Corps Air Station (MCAS) Miramar late in the evening of March 18, 2010. Mr. Mays posed three questions, which I have set forth below along with my response to each.

1. "What is the established protocol for flight over University City from the West?"

Aircraft descending from the west to land on MCAS Miramar's runway 06 do so under Instrument Flight Rules (IFR) prescribed by a Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) approved instrument approach. The answer to question 3, below, likely addresses the features of this approach that would be of most interest to your constituents.

2. "At what height was the jet flying on March 18th?"

Enclosure 1 depicts the actual aircraft approach profile on March 18, 2010. The aircraft was on the established heading and glide slope for the FAA approved instrument approach to runway 06 using Approach Surveillance Radar to land at MCAS Miramar. Two nautical miles from runway 06 the aircraft was 725 feet Above Ground Level (AGL). At .85 nautical miles from runway 06, which is inside the MCAS Miramar boundary, the aircraft was 430 feet AGL.

3. "Above what height are they required to fly in this pattern?"

- At five nautical miles aircraft are descending to 1523 feet AGL.
- At four nautical miles the recommended altitude is 1223 feet AGL.
- At three nautical miles the recommended altitude is 903 feet AGL.
- At two nautical miles the recommended altitude is 603 feet AGL.
- At 0.85 nautical miles the aircraft may not descend below 323 feet AGL unless the runway environment is in sight.

As you can see, the F/A-18 remained above these altitudes during all phases of the approach on the evening of March 18.

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I hope this information will be helpful as you respond to community concerns. I look forward to meeting with you and the community tomorrow, and I will be happy to clarify any further points then.

Sincerely,



F. A. RICHIE
Colonel, U. S. Marine Corps
Commanding Officer

Enclosure: 1. F/A-18 Approach Profile on 18 March 2010

F/A-18 Approach Profile to MCAS Miramar on 18 Mar 2010

NOTE: FAA records indicate aircraft was on the FAA approved Altitude and heading for the entire approach and did not fall below the approved glide slope altitudes for the Airport Surveillance Radar Approach to Runway 6L.

